REMARKS

In the Office Action, claims 1-26 are rejected. More specifically, claims 1-3 and 7 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. §102(e) as being anticipated by U.S. Patent No. 6,230,185 ("Salas"); claims 8, 9 and 26 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. §102(e) as being anticipated by U.S. Patent No. 6,460,036 ("Herz"). Claims 4 and 5 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) in view of Salas. Claim 6 is rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) in view of Salas and further in view of U.S. Patent No. 6,020,884 ("MacNoughton"). Claim 10 is rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) in view of Herz. Claims 11, 20 and 21 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) in view of Herz and further in view of Salas. Claims 12, 13 and 19 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) in view of Herz and further in view of MacNoughton. Claims 14-18 and 23 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) in view of Herz and further in view of U.S. Patent No. 6,742,032 ("Castellani"). Claim 22 is rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) in view of Herz and Salas and further in view of U.S. Patent No. 6,480,885 ("Olivier"). Claims 24 and 25 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) in view of Herz and further in view of Slashdot.org FAQ ("Slashdot"). Claims 1 and 4 have been amended; and claims 2 and 3 have been canceled without prejudice or disclaimer. No new matter has been added thereby. Applicants believe the rejections have been overcome at least for the reasons set forth below.

Of the pending claims at issue, claims 1, 8 and 26 are the sole independent claims. Amended claim 1 recites an information processing apparatus for managing a community. The information processing apparatus for managing a community is formed in a shared virtual space that is constructed via a network and includes a bulletin board for enabling information exchange between members of the community, information storing means for storing positional information of the community, and means for making a setting as to whether only the members of the community are to be permitted to write to and/or to read from the bulletin board, or whether users other than the members are to be permitted to write to and/or read from the bulletin board.

Claim 8 recites an information processing apparatus for managing a plurality of communities in a virtual space. The information processing apparatus for managing a plurality of communities in a virtual space includes first storing means for storing pieces of positional information of the respective communities in the virtual space and second storing means for storing information relating to bulletin boards that are provided in the communities, wherein

when positional information of a newly generated community is stored in the first storing means, and wherein information relating to the newly generated community and which is to be written to bulletin boards of communities that are near the newly generated community in the virtual space is generated and stored in the second storing means.

Claim 26 recites a community managing method for managing a plurality of communities in a virtual space. The method includes controlling the storage of pieces of positional information of the respective communities in the virtual space, controlling the storage of information relating to bulletin boards that are provided in the communities, generating information relating to a newly generated community to be written to bulletin boards of nearby communities that are near the newly generated community in the virtual space and sending the generated information to the nearby communities.

The claimed apparatus forms the set of communities into a virtual space, like an apartment house wherein the rooms of the apartment house are assigned to the respective communities. See, Specification, pg. 10 and Fig. 5. As illustrated in the specification, the position of each community within such a virtual space is stored as a "virtual position". See, Specification, pg. 10 and Fig. 5. This allows a user creating a new community to click on one of the room numbers having an indication that the room is not occupied by a community. See, Specification, pg. 10. Also when a new member moves a cursor to a certain room the interests of that community are displayed, allowing the user to appropriately select a community. See, Specification, pg. 17. The system can be configured in a manner such that rooms adjacent to each other are occupied by communities with members having similar interests. See, Specification, pg. 14. Thus, when a new community is generated in a specified room in the virtual space and greeting messages are transmitted to the communities occupying rooms near the room of the newly generated community, members of other communities who are likely to be interested in the new community receive these greeting messages. See, Specification, pg. 16.

Applicants believe the cited art, even if combinable, is distinguishable from the claimed invention. The Patent Office states that the Salas reference discloses an information processing apparatus wherein the community is formed in a shared virtual space and the apparatus includes information storing means for storing virtual positional information of the community. See, Office Action, pg. 3. Yet the eRooms of Salas are merely stored as a directory, not as an arrayed virtual space that allows the communities to be spatially coordinated by interests. See, Salas,

col. 2, lines 51-56. The Patent Office states that the Herz reference discloses an information processing apparatus which includes storing means for storing positional information of the respective communities in the virtual space. See, Office Action, pg. 3-4. Yet Herz only uses the similarity of communities to create a new common community, not to spatially arrange the communities in an arrayed virtual space coordinated by interests. See, Herz, col. 76 line 58 to col. 77, line 21. Both Salas and Herz fail to recognize an apparatus or method that includes virtual geography where a virtual space is arrayed in rooms such that rooms adjacent to each other are occupied by communities with members having similar interests, in contrast to the claimed invention.

As previously discussed, the claimed process utilizes virtual geography where a virtual space is arrayed in rooms such that rooms adjacent to each other are occupied by communities with members having similar interests. This feature, not provided by Salas or Herz, allows a user creating a new community to click on an unoccupied room near communities of similar interests and permits a new member to move a cursor to certain rooms and view the interests of that community so that the user may appropriately select a community.

Further, the MacNoughton reference, the Castellani reference, the Olivier reference and the Slashdot reference, alone or even if combinable, cannot be relied on solely to remedy the deficiencies of Salas and Herz. With respect to MacNoughton, the Patent Office merely relies on this reference for its purported teaching of membership registration and cancellation questionnaires. See, Office Action, pg. 5-6 and 8. With respect to Castellani, the Patent Office merely relies on this reference for its purported teaching of monitoring and encouraging community activity. See, Office Action, pg. 9. With respect to Olivier, the Patent Office merely relies on this reference for its purported teaching regarding keyword recognition. See, Office Action, page 10. With respect to Slashdot, the Patent Office merely relies on this reference for its purported teaching of a message rating system. See, Office Action, pg. 10-11. Therefore, even if combinable, Applicants do not believe that one skilled in the art would be inclined to modify the cited references to arrive at the claimed invention.

Claims 14-18 and 23 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) in view of Herz and further in view of Castellani. Dependent claims 14-18 depend from dependent claim 13, and claims 13 and 23 depend directly from claim 8.

Dependent claim 13 provides the information processing apparatus according to claim 8, wherein the information relating to the bulletin board that is stored in the second storing means includes at least one of a community ID for identification of the community, a message ID for identification of a message on the bulletin board, a time when the message was written, a user ID that is assigned to a user who wrote the message, and a message ID of another message that is included if the message is a reply to said another message.

Dependent claim 14 provides the information processing apparatus according to claim 13 and further includes extracting means for searching among the information stored in the second storing means for each of the communities, for time points indicating when messages were written to the bulletin board and extracting a time point corresponding to a time when a latest message was written, and sending means for sending an e-mail to an owner of a bulletin board having the latest message if the time point extracted by the extracting means is before a prescribed time point.

Dependent claim 15 provides the information processing apparatus according to claim 13, and further includes extracting means for extracting, for each of the communities, an unreplied to message having no message ID of another message among the information stored in the second storing means, and communicating means for communicating, to an owner of a bulletin board having the unreplied message, the unreplied to message itself extracted by the extracting means. Dependent claims 17 and 18 depend directly from claim 15.

Dependent claim 16 provides the information processing apparatus according to claim 13, and further includes extracting means for extracting, for each of the communities, an unreplied message having no message ID of another message among the information stored in the second storing means, and communicating means for communicating, to an owner of a bulletin board having the unreplied to message, a message to the effect that the unreplied to message exists on the bulletin board.

Dependent claim 23 provides the information processing apparatus according to claim 8, and further includes sending means for sending a message that requests writing to the bulletin board to a user when the user requests reading of a bulletin board, the message request being sent to users randomly at a prescribed probability rate.

Applicants believe the cited art, even if combinable, is distinguishable from the claimed invention. The Patent Office states that the Castellani reference discloses a system for

monitoring and encouraging activity. See, Office Action, pg. 9. Yet in Castellani the community cricket only searches for new information that could be of interest to community members, posts items, recommends items and finds new candidates for joining the community. See, Castellani, col. 6, line 31 to col. 7, line 36. Castellani fails to recognize sending an e-mail to an owner of a bulletin board having the latest message if the time point is before a prescribed time point, in contrast to the invention of claim 14. Castellani fails to recognize communicating an unreplied message to an owner of a bulletin board, in contrast to the invention of claims 15, 17 and 18. Castellani fails to recognize communicating to an owner of a bulletin board a message to the effect that an unreplied to message exists on the bulletin board. Castellani fails to recognize sending a message that requests writing to the bulletin board to a user when the user requests reading of a bulletin board, in contrast to the invention of claim 23. Thus Castellani should be considered distinguishable on its own for at least these reasons.

Further, the Herz reference cannot be relied on solely to remedy the deficiencies of Castellani. In rejection of claims 14-18 and 23, the Patent Office merely relies on the Herz reference for its purported teaching of means for storing positional information of communities in virtual space and means for storing information relating to bulletin boards provided in the communities, wherein information relating to a newly generated community which is to be written to bulletin boards of communities that are near the newly generated community is generated and stored. See, Office Action, pg. 3, 4 and 9. Therefore, even if combinable, Applicants do not believe that one skilled in the art would be inclined to modify the cited references to arrive at the claimed invention.

Based on at least these reasons, Applicants believe that the cited art is distinguishable from the claimed invention. Therefore, Applicants respectfully submit that the cited art, even if combinable, fails to disclose or suggest the claimed invention, and thus fails to anticipate or render obvious the claimed invention.
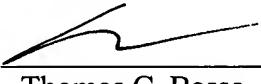
Accordingly, Applicants respectfully request that the anticipation and obviousness rejections with respect to claims 1-26 be withdrawn.

For the foregoing reasons, Applicants respectfully submit that the present application is in condition for allowance and earnestly solicit reconsideration of same.

Respectfully submitted,

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